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Historical Milestones in the Emergence of Nonprofit Public Relations in the United States, 1900-1956

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Abstract

Public relations has gradually emerged as one element of American nonprofit management and pedagogy, albeit a second tier subject. This is an historical inquiry into the emergence of nonprofit public relations in the United States, both as a practitioner activity and a curricular subject. One of the earliest nonprofits to use public relations formally was Harvard in 1900. An early milestone was the spread of public relations from individual nonprofits to a nonprofit subsector, such as a paper at a national social service conference in 1909. Then public relations gradually spread to other subsectors, eventually evolving into somewhat of a generic sectorwide management activity. However, the failure to create a professional organization of nonprofit public relations practitioners in the late 1930s and the uncertain marketing of an arguably generic textbook in 1956 may have reflected the continuing uncertainty, if public relations was a common and similar activity throughout the U.S. nonprofit sector.

Keywords

nonprofit public relations, nonprofit history, nonprofit management, U.S.-based nonprofit organizations

Introduction and Literature Review

Public relations has gradually evolved to have a modest standing as one of the standard elements in the practice of nonprofit management in the United States. In her research on trends in American nonprofit management education, Mirabella (2007) identified

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nine management functions (such as fundraising, legal, HR), one of which was "Marketing and public relations " (p. 18S). Her statistics showed that the growth in the number of public relations courses offered at US institutions of higher education increased by 55% between 1996 and 2006. However, these courses remained only 6%-7% of the entire number of nonprofit management courses offered. The discernable, but modest, status of public relations in the nonprofit sector was also demonstrated in the revised graduate curricular guidelines issued by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council in 2007. It identified 14 topics for a model curriculum, one of which was nonprofit marketing. Public relations was listed as a subject area within marketing (Nonprofit Academic Centers Council [NACC], 2007, p. 11). Similarly, the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA, 2009) maintains a standard list of 58 areas of members' research interests, one of which is "public relations, public information, communication". Public relations has a similarly modest, but discernable, profile in the sister field of public administration pedagogy (Lee, 2009).

The literature on nonprofit public relations is also modest in relation to the larger literatures on U.S. nonprofit management and nonprofit pedagogy. For example, regarding news media relations, Hale (2007) concluded that "the systematic study of the media and nonprofits is still in its infancy" (p. 482). Also, much of the literature has focused on a narrower subject, namely, the link between nonprofit public relations and fundraising (Cutlip, 1990). That close linkage has been a continuing theme in the practitioner literature going back to the first half of the 20th century (Chicago Central Council, n.d.; Pierce, 1938; Street, 1917). Kelly, the most prolific contemporary academician after Cutlip, also focused much of her work on the interrelationship of nonprofit public relations and fundraising (Kelly, 1991, 1998, 2004). Similarly, McAdoo and Pynes (1995) published a case study about a nonprofit agency that created a public relations campaign to increase private contributions to replace reductions in government funding, but they focused mostly on the unintended internal management consequences of the public relations campaign.

Nonetheless, as an indication of the vitality of practice and pedagogy, the first decade of the 21st century saw the publication of six textbooks on nonprofit public relations; three de novo titles (Beckwith, 2006; Feinglass, 2005; Leet, 2007) and second editions of three others (Bonk, Tynes, Griggs, & Sparks, 2008; Patterson & Radtke, 2009; Salzman, 2003). This suggests the growth and increased attention to the subject, both in practice and in the classroom.

These contemporary texts generally focus on the central role of public relations in the modern era of communications and information. For example, Bonk et al. (2008) present public relations as a strategic and mission-driven tool that can help many of the vertical silos within each nonprofit. It can "increase name recognition, boost fundraising, recruit membership, and advance changes in public policy" (p. xxi). Significantly, that contemporary definition of nonprofit public relations was little different from one presented 80 years earlier. A 1928 survey of nonprofit social work agencies stated that public relations' purposes were "to induce them [the public] to give money or service to relieve suffering, to change personal habits, or to acknowledge and correct injustice" (M. Routzahn & E. Routzahn, 1928, p. iii). It is striking that, with an interval of eight decades, *both* listed the important contributions of public relations as including three

areas: fundraising, volunteers and public policy. So, from then to now, technologies have changed, even nomenclature, but the raison d'être of nonprofit public relations has remained remarkably stable. That close correlation suggests an inquiry into nonprofit public relations in the past is not only an exercise in historical research but also may have some practical relevance to the contemporary scene.

There are other indications in the contemporary literature of the importance of nonprofit public relations to the modern-day nonprofit sector. Kelly's (2004) entry in an encyclopedia of the U.S. nonprofit sector stated that "nonprofits are dependent for their success on effective public relations" (p. 404). Similarly, Lee's (2008) entry in a different encyclopedia commented on "the increasing importance of external relations in nonprofit organizations" (p. 1351). According to Werther and Berman (2001), "So crucial is the image of the nonprofit that many nonprofits will seek out someone from the public relations or marketing community to serve on its board" (p. 87). Tschirhart (1996) noted that members of arts boards of directors "stressed the importance of maintaining their organization's image, reputation and prestige" (p. 79). Finally, Grunig (1997), a major theoretician of modern public relations, included nonprofit organizations in his pan-sectorial theory on excellence in public relations (p. 243). He highlighted "the crucial role that the CEO and the dominant coalition of an organization play" in accomplishing excellent public relations, regardless of sector (Grunig, 1992, p. 236). So, a running theme of the relatively recent literature is to note the significance of PR to the contemporary nonprofit scene.

However, besides Cutlip, this relatively modest literature on nonprofit public relations has paid little attention to the historical development of the field. Therefore, this inquiry seeks to examine the early milestones in the professionalization of nonprofit public relations in the United States, including early instructional texts. Textbooks are a manifestation of the emergence of a coherent professional framework and also are, for historical research, statements of the accepted theories and dogmas at that time. As an element of nonprofit management, additional historical knowledge on the professionalization of nonprofit public relations also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the larger history of U.S. nonprofit management and its parallel pedagogy.

Terminology, Scope and Methods

The nomenclature "public relations" and "nonprofit sector" are both neologisms. They existed as activities and phenomena long before these terms began being applied to them, especially when used retroactively in the writing of history. Cutlip (1995) observed that "The term *public relations* [italics in original] did not generally come into our language until the late 19th century" (p. ix), with such terms as "publicity" and "press agentry" often used instead. However, Cutlip was able to identify historical events as early as the 16th century that would fit into the later invention of public relations as a field of activity. Similarly, nonprofit-like activities are practically as old as civilization. As independent legal entities, not-for-profit nonstock corporations have existed in the United States since the Supreme Court's 1819 *Dartmouth* decision. Nonetheless, Hall (1992) suggested that the U.S. nonprofit sector was only "invented" between the 1950s through the 1980s.

Therefore, an inquiry into the milestones in the professionalization of nonprofit public relations in the United States, including pedagogic texts, must clearly delineate how to apply this pair of neologisms on an historical basis. There were nearly 500 definitions of public relations as of 1976 (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, p. 5). For the purposes of this project, the contemporary definition used by *Public Relations News* is succinct and fits with lay understandings of it: "public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (quoted in Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, p. 4). This is an appealing generic definition because it focuses on external relations activities aimed at general public understanding. This definition excludes highly targeted out-of-house communications activities such as paid lobbying or grants management. These latter topics focus on very specialized audiences and have specific goals. Also, they can be very significant in some nonprofits while practically nonexistent in others.

Conversely, the definition of PR used here is relatively applicable to almost all nonprofit agencies, namely, of being in good standing with the citizenry as a whole. Few nonprofits in contemporary times want or seek the stereotypical "public be damned" approach. Rather, there is a generalized desire for the public's understanding even when the agency is implementing an organizational mission, which might be substantively approved of only by a small minority of the public-at-large. Goodwill is an asset that nonprofit managers seek and cherish for their agencies. Nonprofit public relations is aimed at the public-at-large and has a generalized goal of maintaining a positive public image. It sometimes is free (such as coverage in the news media or public service advertising) but can include paid advertising. As such, public relations is much more than media relations, an unfortunate common misperception. Instead, it covers a broad swath of organizational external communications. "Public relations" is used here as a neutral term involving a professional management function as used in the literature, in contradistinction to the popular usage of the acronym public relations, generally implying external communications activities that are false, manipulative, even sinister (such as Stauber & Rampton, 2004).

Based on Cutlip's (1994) 20th century history of public relations, individual U.S. nonprofit corporations engaged in PR within the first few decades that the field began emerging. This historical inquiry seeks to explore the evolution of nonprofit public relations beyond such initial uses by single nonprofit organizations to its expansion into an organized and professional management activity within the nonprofit sector *as a whole*. Therefore, the historical milestones used in this inquiry regarding the professionalization of nonprofit public relations in the United States can be identified as (a) when it became broadly practiced in individual nonprofits, (b) when it was common in a nonprofit *sub*sector and, finally, (c) when it became relatively de rigueur in most, if not all, of the entire sector.

The methodology for this inquiry involved mainstream historical research techniques. For historical research in nonprofit management and public administration, McNabb (2008) encouraged researchers facing incomplete original and primary records

"to fall back on the tried and true practice of *triangulation* [italics in original], validating the remaining archival record using other sources" (p. 378). This project necessitated such a triangulation approach to develop a relatively comprehensive historical narrative.

Primary and original sources included official organizational publications, such as proceedings of conferences, pamphlets, training manuals, textbooks, and newsletters, and an interview. Archival materials were obtained from the Russell Sage Foundation archives at the Rockefeller Archives, Pocantico Hills (New York) and the Pamphlet Collection and the archives of the Committee on Publicity Methods in Social Work at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison (Wisconsin). Research inquiries were also submitted to staff of the YWCA archives at Smith College, Northampton (Massachusetts); New York University Archives; the Science, Industry and Business Library of the New York public Library; and the New York City Municipal Library. Contemporaneous newspaper coverage was sought through NewspaperARCHIVE.com, the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, and the morgues of the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York Journal American* at the Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin. Secondary sources were similarly traditional and mainstream, including academic literature, published histories, and memoirs.

Germination of Nonprofit Public Relations

External communications and publicity activities by individual nonprofits have occurred in the United States as long as there have been such organizations and especially since the maturing of the mass circulation newspaper (Cutlip, 1995, pp. 252-263). In the first half of the 19th century "The whole concept of publicity, in their world, remained primitive" (Randall & Nahra, 1998, pp. 170-171).[1] Nonprofits "quickly grasped the importance of publicity for raising funds, and . . . bolstering their credibility through institutional transparency" (McCarthy, 2003, p. 42). Early nonprofits learned the importance of circulating their annual reports as widely as possible, as a way of accounting to current members and contributors, attracting new members and contributors, and, generally, influencing public opinion. Regarding the latter, the influence of such annual reports "was supplemented by their republication in newspapers and magazines. The annual report was a new form of literature that contemporaries considered worthy of review and discussion" (Neem, 2008, p. 88).

The Civil War catalyzed the use by nonprofit organizations of public relations as an integral part of their operations. For example, Annie Turner Wittenmyer, a relatively forgotten Civil War era activist "understood publicity better than some" Union Army officers she worked with (Randall & Nahra, 1998, p. 173). Similarly, the Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission used public relations to help families learn the fate of relatives serving in the Union army and to generate support for their own activities (Faust, 2008, chap. 4). By the Progressive era (conventionally defined as 1890-1920), many nonprofits became increasingly aware of the benefits of public relations, including its link to fundraising. Public relations became increasingly common in some of the vertical subsectors of the nonprofit sector

Early Public Relations in the Higher Education Subsector

In 1900, Harvard University was one of the first clients of The Publicity Bureau, the first public relations firm in the United States (Cutlip, 1994, pp. 10-20). Other early adopters from that subsector included the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the New England Conservatory of Music (pp. 15-16). These were largely for fundraising purposes.

The spread of public relations in individual institutions of higher education was reflected in the founding in 1917 of the American Association of College News Bureaus. Kelly (2004) called its establishment "noteworthy" historically because it was an early manifestation "that public relations became an internal, staff function of nonprofits" (p. 405).[2] However, the association was bi-sectorial in conceptualization and membership. It comprised PR professionals from public sector schools as well as from nonprofit institutions of higher education.

Early Public Relations in the Social Service Subsector

Early on, the social services subsector displayed extensive recognition of the importance of public relations.[3] The 1909 annual meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections included a session on "Press and Publicity" followed by a panel on "What Constitutes Right Publicity" ("Publicity in charities," 1909). One of the panelists emphasized the benefits of public relations to all nonprofit agencies involved in social services. Frederick Greene was a senior staffer at the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. His conference paper advocated that "The public should not only be allowed to know about all the work that concerns the public good, it should be made to know. This principle applied to relief work might be bluntly stated as follows: Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, and let as many as possible know it" (Greene, 1909, p. 350).

The YMCA was also in the forefront of nonprofit PR, as it was for many other elements of nonprofit management and management training in the United States. (The YMCA could, of course, also be categorized as a religious organization.) In 1910, the refresher program on "City Association Administration" for current chapter secretaries at the Y's Lake Geneva (WI) summer camp included sessions on "Publicity" (Institute and Training School of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1910, p. 8). Two years later, when the Chicago YMCA College created a Bachelor of Association Science degree, one of the required courses was in "Promotion and Publicity" (Institute and Training School of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1912, p. 10).

PR in social services took a quantum leap beginning in the mid-1910s, when the Russell Sage Foundation (based in New York City) began a three decade-long campaign to promote the use of PR by nonprofit social work agencies (Hammack & Wheeler, 1994, pp. 23, 85-86; Glenn, Brandt, & Andrews, 1947, pp. 184-192, 361-65, 580-583). The effort was partly an outgrowth of the Foundation's interest in conducting what was

then a cutting-edge social science methodology, called the community survey. This entailed a comprehensive collection of statistics relating to the social conditions in a city. One way to use the results to move public opinion toward supporting social reforms was through an exhibition ("Effective Exhibition," 1915a; 1915b). This in turn led the Foundation to suggesting expanding the use of exhibits to other health and welfare campaigns (E. Routzahn & M. Routzahn, 1918; M. Routzahn, 1920).

The Foundation's involvement was initially led by the husband and wife team of Evart and Mary Swain Routzahn of its Department of Surveys and Exhibits.[4] The Foundation believed that public relations would benefit nonprofit social work agencies in three ways. First, it would help educate the public-at-large about the value of this relatively new profession and the contributions these new professionals were making to the improvement of social conditions. Second, successful public relations would help with social service agencies' fundraising efforts. Third, public relations could be used as an educational tool to persuade individuals to modify their own and others' behaviors to improve public health.

The Foundation's first publication on the broader subject of social work publicity (as opposed to exhibits only) occurred in 1920. Mr. Routzahn presented a talk at the annual meeting of the National Conference of Social Work on the "Elements of a Social Publicity Program."[5] The Foundation then published the paper as a pamphlet to further promote such activities throughout the United States (E. Routzahn, 1920).

The same year, the Foundation took a major step to institutionalize the practice of public relations in social work. It helped found and largely funded a new organization called the Committee on Publicity Methods in Social Work.[6] Located in the Foundation's offices, the Committee sought to professionalize the practice of public relations by social service agencies as a way of, what it called, interpreting social work to the public. The Committee issued a stream of pamphlets and publications, conducted training programs, engaged in research of practitioner trends, encouraged the creation of university-level courses and provided consulting services to its members.[7]

The Routzahns were dedicated to using empirical social science as the basis for their research findings, surveying local nonprofit agencies around the country on what PR programs they had, what worked and what best practices would be. Other, increasingly formal pedagogic publications followed. In 1928, the Foundation published *Publicity for Social Work*, a 392-page compendium of social service public relations techniques including newspapers, publications, public speaking, public information campaigns, and exhibits. The book was largely intended as a tool kit for practitioners. The authors summarized the rationale for public relations by nonprofit social service agencies as

> A characteristic of publicity for social work is that it urges information on people who do not seek it. An effort to induce them to give money or service to relieve suffering, to change personal habits, or to acknowledge and correct injustice must often be unwelcome. To secure their attention under these circumstances necessarily requires an aggressive process of overcoming indifference and creating a desire for understanding. (M. Routzahn & E. Routzahn, 1928, p. iii)

However, the Routzahns carefully identified *government* agencies in the area of public health as their models for pioneering use of publicity. In fact, the activities of the North Carolina State Board of Health were "The main part of our field work" (M. Routzahn & E. Routzahn, 1928, p. iv). This is an indication that government public relations (at least in public health) was quite advanced relative to nonprofit social services. It also suggests the common applicability of the same public relations techniques to two sectors, public and nonprofit, regarding public health and welfare.

In 1932, the Foundation published a more pedagogically oriented booklet for "a brief course" on social work publicity "for informal study groups" (M. Routzahn, 1932). Five years after that, it issued a textbook on PR intended "for a quarter's or semester's elementary course in a school of social work" at the university-level as well as for noncredit professional development and continuing education workshops (Baker & Routzahn, 1937, p. 5).[8]

Early Public Relations in the Civic and Religious Subsectors

During the Progressive era, civic and advocacy organizations were beginning to use public relations techniques to pursue their missions. These included women's organizations, such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Association of Colored Women (Straughan, 2007); (what would now be called) civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Anti-Defamation League and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU; Larson, 1997, p. 67); and good government reform bureaus, such as the pioneering and template setting New York Bureau of Municipal Research (Schachter, 1997).

Houses of worship were also awakening to the value of public relations. An early text on church advertising was published by Stelzle in 1908. However, the author focused almost exclusively on paid advertising and denigrated free publicity and other forms of public relations (Stelzle, 1908, pp. 48-49). In 1913, another text expanded the topic by focusing more broadly on religious public relations, including—besides paid advertising—free news coverage, publications, flyers, handouts, and even motion pictures (Reisner, 1913). Issued by the publishing house affiliated with the denomination of the original Massachusetts Pilgrims, the author surveyed Protestant clergy around the country for their views on the propriety or impropriety (mostly, as would be expected, the former) of using publicity to promote religion and recounted success stories and best practices supplied by the survey respondents.

Early Public Relations by Professional Associations

PR was a topic of two papers presented at the 1914 founding meeting of the National Association of Commercial Organization Secretaries (NACOS).[9] Its members were the secretaries (in modern nomenclature, the CEOs) of local chambers of commerce in the United States. Hence NACOS was a nonprofit association of managers of nonprofit associations. This meant NACOS was somewhat different from professional organizations such as American Bar Association (founded in 1878) or the American Historical

Association (founded in 1884) because NACOS's membership eligibility was based on the office one held at that moment, not on one's permanent professional affiliation. At NACOS's founding conference, one paper stated, "We are living in an age of publicity" and the heads of chambers of commerce needed to pursue press coverage in local newspapers as in the best interests of the nonprofit itself (Boldt, 1914, p. 96). The second paper was a report of a committee appointed to survey the public relations activities of the members. It, too, focused on the importance of free news coverage, summarizing that "there is an almost universal opinion that liberal newspaper support is one of the greatest assets an organization can have" (Dehoney & Deland, 1914, p. 169). The committee report also provided statistics on other PR activities of local chambers, including paid newspaper advertising, newsletters, and out-of-town boosterism to attract tourism and new employers.

In 1921, another professional membership association sought to promote the use of public relations. The American Association of Engineers convened "The First National Engineering Conference on Public Information" and the next year published a book based of the conference's papers. This nonprofit association sought to imbue all its members, whether employed by private firms or government agencies, to understand the value of good public relations to their profession: "there are services to sell—the services of every individual engineer and of engineers in general. Publicity will enhance the value of these services. . . . To aid this work, it is necessary to build up a reputation" (American Association, 1922, pp. 4-5). The reputation the association was seeking was that "The engineer has been the conqueror of nature" (p. 24).

Growth of Sector-wide Public Relations: Publications, 1915-1937

By the third decade of the 20th century, there was increasing recognition in the United States of the growing importance of public opinion as a modern political force that could impose itself on all sectors of the political economy. Lippmann's landmark 1922 book was the founding document of the professional study of public opinion (Lippmann, 1997).[10] In turn, this rise in "Public Opinion"[11] further accelerated the self-conscious awareness of the importance public relations (usually called "publicity" at that time) for the governmental, business, and nonprofit sectors.

One author directly linked the benefits of nonprofit public relations with the Progressive movement itself. In a 1915 book titled *Publicity and Progress*, Smith was one of the first to suggest that public relations was potentially a generic sectorwide activity, rather than being limited to a particular subsector. He argued that there was an approach to publicity that equally applied to "religious, semi-religious, educational and charitable institutions of all sorts" (Smith, 1915, p. v). That meant his focus encompassed multiple nonprofit subsectors, including health, education, social services, and religion and possibly the arts, civic organizations, and foundations. At another point, the author defined the audience for the book slightly differently, as "non-commercial enterprises engaged in philanthropic work" (p. 13).[12] Clearly, the author was struggling with the lack of nomenclature, trying to define the sector by what it was not (not business), parallel to the nonprofit neologism that began emerging about three decades later.

In general, Smith argued that just about any nonprofit organization could engage in a wide variety of publicity techniques for purposes of being "altruistic" but simultaneously could also use them as a way "to increase its effectiveness and enlarge its support" (Smith, p. 14). He advocated not only reliance on free media, but also paid advertising, circulars, broad circulation of annual reports, window signs, public events, and attention to treatment of guests and visitors. The *New York Times Book Review* listed it in its "Books Worth Reading" feature (Books, 1915).

The subtitle of a 1923 handbook on conducting publicity was *A Manual for the Use of Business, Civic or Social Service Organizations*. This suggested it was oriented both to the private and nonprofit sectors. However, in the Preface, the coauthors were careful to explain that the text was intended primarily for use by businessmen. As for the nonprofit sector, the book was aimed at citizen volunteers serving on boards and committees, not public relations professionals working for nonprofits (Wilder & Buell, 1923, p. v). Later, they noted that publicity activities in "The whole field of charitable or welfare work is so large and varied that it is impossible to go into it in detail here" (p. 32), thus suggesting the existence of a sector-wide approach to public relations. However, at another point, they focused on differences in subsectors, stating that publicity by social service nonprofits was "a technique of their own," distinctly different from other nonprofit subsectors (p. 29).

The next year, another text focused on more than one subsector. As part of their work the Russell Sage Foundation on social welfare public relations, the Routzahns published a comprehensive reading list. They explicitly included in their intended audience nonprofit organizations outside the social services subsector, which they called "Kindred Fields." These included the subsectors of religion, education, health, civic participation, and community development (E. Routzahn & M. Routzahn, 1924, p. 3). A further effort occurred 13 years later. An article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1937 suggested that there was significant commonality in the practice of PR activities by "churches, universities, colleges, schools, hospitals, and welfare agencies" (Brown, 1937, p. 138).

An entry in an academically oriented social sciences encyclopedia published in the early 1930s surveyed the uses of publicity throughout the American political economy. It noted that publicity techniques had only recently been adopted by a wide spectrum of the nonprofit sector. Lacking the later neologism, the author described these as "Philanthropies, educational and social work enterprises." He described their rationale for such a publicity focus as "bringing their purposes to the public attention," but concluded these nonprofit organizations did so in a "more conservative fashion" than the business sector (Gruening, 1934, p. 701).

Growth of Sector-wide Public Relations: The Conference on Association Publicity, 1938-1941

A major effort to professionalize nonprofit public relations sector-wide occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1938, the senior public relations staffers from a broad variety

of New York City-based national nonprofit organizations sought to establish their own national professional membership organization, called the Conference on Association Publicity ("Business World," 1938). The group's initial members reflected the sectorwide approach they were seeking. Early activists came from (in alphabetical order) the American Management Association, American Road Builders Association, American Standards Association, Boys Scouts of America, Golden Rule Foundation, Hotel Sales Managers Association, National Retail Dry Goods Association, Russell Sage Foundation, Society for the Prevention of Blindness, and the YWCA. They elected officers and tried to create a schedule of monthly luncheons. The topics of the talks given at those meetings included libel in publicity, pre-convention publicity, the uses of publications, and—from the business news editor of the *New York Herald-Tribune*—"What Happens to Newspaper Releases" ("Elections and Activities," 1938; "Business World," 1938, 1939; "News and Notes," 1939; "Business Notes," 1939, 1940; "Heads Publicity Group," 1940; Boy Scouts, 1941, p. 164). A similar effort was made to create a chapter in Chicago, which included the public relations officer of the Field Museum of Natural History (Field Museum, 1942, p. 429).

However, for reasons that could not be definitively ascertained from the historical record, this initiative failed to cohere into a permanent organization.[13] One explanation might be that there was not an adequate critical mass of practitioners to be able to sustain a professional membership association. Perhaps there just were not enough of them, even in the nation's economic and cultural capital of New York City. It is also possible that the sector-wide approach was not a strong enough common bond to create a sense of shared professionalism. The interests of public relations professionals in commercial and trade associations may have turned out to be substantially different from, for example, their counterparts in social service, health and educational nonprofits. If so, then this would have been a demonstration of one of the weaknesses inherent in the dual neologistic nature of the nonprofit public relations.

Normalization of Sector-Wide Public Relations? 1940s-1950s

Half a decade after the demise of the Conference on Association Publicity, another effort to identify the existence of sector-wide nonprofit public relations occurred in a public relations practitioner publication. The public relations director of the national YMCA wrote an article suggesting the existence of a profession of nonprofit public relations. The centrality of his approach was signaled by including sectorial nomenclature in the article's title: "300,000 Non-Profit Organizations—And Their Public Relations" (Leibert, 1946). The author considered the practice of public relations to be the same whether occurring in "social work, health and welfare agencies, churches, community chests, youth agencies and various other charitable, educational, [and] cultural" organizations (p. 23).[14]

Still, despite these preceding examples, a sectorwide approach to public relations was still somewhat anomalous. A new textbook issued by a major commercial publishing house in New York in 1956 was premised on the existence of generic nonprofit public relations. Harold Levy, a former staffer of the Russell Sage Foundation who had been

involved in its social work publicity program, wrote a textbook on public relations.[15] The book reflected some tensions, or at least uncertainties, in such a sectorwide approach versus the more traditional focus on one or two subsectors. In the Preface, Levy identified the audience for the book as social and welfare agencies (1956, p. ix). Indeed, the book's title was *Public Relations for Social Agencies*. However, the subtitle reflected the suggestion of the applicability of the book to several more subsectors: *A Guide for Health, Welfare, and Other Community Organizations* (p. iii). Going further, the blurb on the book's dust jacket showed that the publisher was marketing it to a nearly sectorwide audience: "charitable, social, religious, and civic organizations." In fact, a book review in the journal of a public relations professional association (theoretically encompassing members from all sectors; but its membership was predominantly from business) noted this discrepancy (Ducas, 1956, p. 22). That this 1950s textbook still reflected uncertainty whether there was a common sectorwide approach to nonprofit public relations fits nicely with Hall's timeline for the beginning of the "invention" of the sector itself in the 1950s.

Conclusions

This historical narrative has traced some important milestones in the gradual evolution of the practice and pedagogy of nonprofit public relations in the United States from individual organizations (such as Harvard) to a few subsectors and then to the sector as a whole. By the middle of the 20th century, public relations was becoming a relatively common management activity and curricular focus in the American nonprofit sector.

However, the narrative hints at factors that contribute to public relations' second tier status in the profession and in the academy. First, nonprofit public relations has largely been practiced and researched as an extension of fundraising, thus ghettoizing it from broader sectorial applications and benefits. Second, the subsectors that were the early adopters of public relations represented only a portion of the entire sector. Third, the failure of the Conference on Association Publicity to institutionalize itself suggested that nonprofit public relations practitioners had less in common than they originally thought and perhaps that there were not enough of them for a sustainable national professional association.

Finally, the somewhat uncertain marketing of Levy's 1956 volume as a generic textbook for sectorwide nonprofit public relations may have reflected the ongoing weaknesses of the profession. To paraphrase the quip about the similarities between public administration and business administration,[16] perhaps a rigorous comparison of public relations among different nonprofit subsectors might show that they were fundamentally alike in all unimportant respects.

If these are accurate conclusions from the historical record, then this highlights the dual neologistic nature inherent in nonprofit public relations. Public relations is perhaps an artificial conceptualization of a supposedly common management function built on an equally artificial conceptualization of U.S. nonprofits as a unified sector. If so, then nonprofit public relations will continue to be a constructive element of nonprofit management and pedagogy, but perhaps it should be reoriented to be practiced, researched, and instructed based on a subsector, rather than a sectorwide, approach.

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Notes

1. This observation was made largely in the context of the frontier and new settlement areas, but it also is generally applicable to higher density populations on the Atlantic coast as well.
2. The organization went through several name changes and then a merger with university fund-raisers. It is now (2009) the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE).
3. It should be recalled that in the first three decades of the 20th century, almost all social work agencies were nonprofit. The emergence of permanent and large governmental departments of public welfare was a phenomenon that began in the 1930s, largely as part of the New Deal.
4. After an internal reorganization of the Foundation in 1932, they worked in the Department of Social Work Interpretation.
5. In 1917, the National Conference of Charities and Corrections had changed its name to National Conference of Social Work.
6. During its life (1920-1977), the organization's title changed to Social Work Publicity Council, National Publicity Council for Health and Welfare Services, National Public Relations Council of Health and Welfare Services and, finally, National Communication Council for Human Services.
7. In 1940, the Foundation substantially changed its agenda and withdrew its financial support for the PR group ("The National Publicity Council For Health and Welfare Services: [Report] From 1941-1944," File: National Publicity Council, 1944-1948; Folder 265; Box 33; Russell Sage Foundation Collection; Rockefeller Archive Center). In 1977, the public relations group merged into the PR Society of America (PRSA), the premier national membership association for PR practitioners (as opposed to academicians). Then, and now, the predominant sectorial affiliation of PRSA's members was the business sector. The members of the National Communication Council for Human Services did not automatically obtain membership in PRSA. About 10% did not meet PRSA's qualifications for members (Folder 2: Dissolution Memoranda, 1976-1977; Box 1; National Public Relations Council for Health and Human Services; Wisconsin Historical Society). This was largely because some of the Council's members were, by professional training, social workers and sometimes only a portion of their work entailed public relations (email to the author from Carlton Spitzer, last President of the National Communication Council for Human Services, January 7, 2009; author's files).
8. A decade later, they wrote a second edition with a slightly different title (Baker & Routzahn, 1947).
9. NACOS was founded as a merger of the American Association of Commercial Executives, which had been founded in 1906 with a membership predominantly from the Northeast,

and the Central Association of Commercial Secretaries, founded in 1909 with membership predominantly from the Midwest. The current (2009) name of the organization is American Chamber of Commerce Executives.

10. Lippmann's only reference to the nonprofit sector was in the context public opinion benefiting from the public relations of nonprofit organizations as expert and credible sources of information and as intermediaries in the development of public opinion. His list, intermingling nonprofits with other sectors, included "the bureaus of municipal research, the legislative reference libraries, the specialized lobbies of corporations and trade unions and public causes, and by voluntary organizations like the League of Women Voters, the Consumers' League, the Manufacturers' Associations; by hundreds of trade associations, and citizens' unions; . . . and by foundations" (1997, p. 238).
11. Lippmann capitalized the term in some places in the book, partly ironically and partly to remind the reader of the artificiality of the concept as used in public affairs.
12. Smith strayed from his exclusive focus on the nonprofit sector when, in his discussion of PR for institutions of higher education, he included state universities (Chap. 11). This is consistent with the mission of the organization, founded 2 years later, for publicity staffers in both nonprofit and public colleges and universities.
13. This researcher was unable to locate any archive holding the organizational records of the Conference on Association Publicity. Also, archives of some of the nonprofits that employed the leaders of the nascent organization did not contain any relevant material either.
14. Despite the article's title, Leibert sometimes described his topic as encompassing all PR that occurred outside industry and business, thus lumping government PR together with nonprofit PR. However, the contents of the article are almost exclusively about the nonprofit sector.
15. Levy's memoirs include some reminiscences about his work at the Russell Sage Foundation promoting the use of PR in the social services subsector (1985, pp. 142, 150-153).
16. The quip "public and private management are fundamentally alike in all unimportant respects" has been attributed to political scientist Wallace Sayre (1905-1972) and widely quoted. The earliest published reference to it was in a monograph of a 1979 conference paper by Graham Allison (1980, p. 1).

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Bio

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